



## Women and politics: To win, you have to run

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by Debbie Walsh

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Women bring important experiences and values to the political process, and we need them to run for office; serve on local, state, and national boards and commissions; and contribute to the public discourse on important issues facing our nation. Now more than ever, at this historic and challenging moment in our country's history, the voices of women, especially Jewish women, need to be heard.

This year's presidential election was extraordinary for women and politics. From beginning to end the focus was on women — from Hillary Clinton's candidacy for president, the first viable campaign by a woman for that office; to her historic wins in primaries across the country; to the selection of Sarah Palin as the first female Republican vice presidential nominee; and finally to the power of the women's vote in the final outcome of the election.

Women made a difference in this year's presidential election because women voted differently from men. Since 1980, more women than men have voted for the Democratic candidate by between four and seven percentage points. This year, men split their vote pretty evenly, but women were seven points *more* likely than men to vote for Barack Obama.

We saw the continued power of the women's vote, but we saw the continued paucity of female candidates at every level. We saw a net gain of only one in the Senate — and if New York Gov. David Paterson selects a man to fill Hillary Clinton's seat, then that gain will disappear. There will be 11 new women in the House of Representatives when Congress reconvenes in 2009, but that only brings the total from 71 to 75. In New Jersey, we continue to have no women in our congressional delegation. And across the country, 24.3 percent of all state legislators will be women, a modest gain from 23.7 percent in 2008. Jewish women make up less than 4 percent of all female elected officials in New Jersey: Approximately 14 Jewish women hold elected office as mayors, freeholders, and state legislators; approximately 24 Jewish women are past or present councilwomen in New Jersey's 560 municipalities.

Unfortunately, these minimal increases follow a pattern we've been seeing since the early '90s: almost no growth in the number of women running and, therefore, almost no growth in the number of women winning elected office.

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics has been working with diverse communities throughout the state to enhance women's leadership. Just a few short years ago, New Jersey ranked 43rd in the nation for the percentage of women serving in its legislature. Now, thanks in part to CAWP's Ready to Run campaign training for women, New Jersey will rank 13th in the nation in the percentage of female lawmakers when legislatures across the country reconvene in January.

Jewish women are being encouraged to get more involved in ensuring that women run and win elected office. The United Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ is working in partnership with CAWP to convene Politics, Power & Jewish Women, a one-day training program that will take place Jan. 28 in Whippany. It is for Jewish women who want to become more involved in all aspects of public life. They'll learn about running for elected office, raising funds, handling the media, and public speaking, and what they need to know about NJ politics to become a more effective advocate.

Increasing women's political participation won't happen without active intervention. If we want to see more women serving, we need to make sure we are reaching out and encouraging women to run for office. Women often don't see themselves as future officeholders, they are more reluctant to run, and the party leadership is less likely to encourage them to enter into the political process.

Through Politics, Power & Jewish Women, we hope to help break this cycle and help women in the Garden State to learn more about the political process, find out how they can get more involved, and even run for office themselves.

**Debbie Walsh is director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics.**

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## **Politics, Power & Jewish Women**

United Jewish Communities of MetroWest NJ, in partnership with the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, will convene Politics, Power & Jewish Women, a one-day training program for Jewish women who want to learn how to be more involved in public life. The program will be held Wednesday, Jan. 28, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Alex Aidekman Family Jewish Community Campus in Whippany. Register at [www.ujcnj.org/crc](http://www.ujcnj.org/crc).

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